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# Near East/South Asia Report

EGYPT: HISTORICAL ROOTS OF  
THE TABA PROBLEM

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18 July 1985

## NEAR EAST/SOUTH ASIA REPORT

## EGYPT: HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE TABA PROBLEM

Cairo AL-USUL AL-TA'RIKHIYAH LI MAS'ALAT TABA in Arabic 1983 pp 5-87

[Table of Contents, Foreword, Introduction and Part 1 of book, "HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE TABA PROBLEM" by Dr Yunan Labib Rizq, Misr al-Nahdah, the Center for Egyptian Archives and Contemporary History, General Egyptian Book Organization, 168 pages + 39 pages reprint in English of "Correspondence Respecting the Turco-Egyptian Frontier in the Sinai Peninsula"]

## [Text] Table of Contents

Foreword . . . . .	7
Introduction . . . . .	9
Part One: The Study	
--An Introduction: Why Taba? . . . . .	15
--Chapter One: Onset and Origins of the Crisis . . . . .	20
--Chapter Two: Negotiations . . . . .	34
--Chapter Three: The Crisis . . . . .	53
--Conclusion: The Turks Yield and Recognize Taba as Egyptian . . . . .	79
--Bibliography . . . . .	86
Part Two: The Documents	
--First, Egyptian Documents . . . . .	91
--Second, Arabic Translation of British Documents . . . . .	102

## Foreword

Publication of the first book in the series, "Misr al-Nahdah," [The Awakening of Egypt] while the 100th anniversary of the liberation of Sinai is being celebrated is an ideal opportunity for setting forth the concept upon which this series is based.

There are three parts to this concept:

1. The series was to serve Egyptian issues.
2. It was believed that this service could only be achieved by serious and objective studies that adhere to scientific form and enlighten the public at the same time.

3. Accomplishing all that would be possible by probing the depths of Egyptian history and getting out all the facts so these may be used to serve Egyptian reality. History here is certainly not confined to political incidents, but it rather involves all the economic, social and intellectual implications of the past and ultimately emerges as a continuous fabric carefully woven and constructed by previous generations. We owe it to these generations to show what they accomplished; we owe it to ourselves to learn from what they did.

It is in this context and on this great occasion that the first book in this series is being published under the title, "Al-Usul al-Ta'rikhiyah li Mas'alat Taba" [The Historical Roots of the Taba Problem]. This book thus fulfills the objectives of the series.

This book does serve Egyptian issues because it provides the historical background for one of the problems that has to do with Egypt's borders. It is a problem that arose on a previous occasion but was settled in a manner that left no doubt about Egypt's rights in the area and in those areas around it as well.

The book adheres to scientific form in that it is very well documented. The author tried hard to provide documentation from neutral sources: hence, the attention given to British documents.

Finally, the book is an in-depth study of Egypt's history and an examination of a part of the country's coast that is being disputed by others. This gives the historical study here an influential role.

The only statement to be made after that is to express the hope that this first book in the series, "The Awakening of Egypt," express the objectives of the series and pave the way for other books, which would create a link between Egyptian and Arab intellectuals and the national history of their country.

It is God Who determines the purpose of our path.

The Center for Egyptian Archives and Contemporary History

The General Egyptian Book Organization

#### Introduction

This small post that is located northwest of the Gulf of Aqaba is destined to become associated with every crisis that develops when the boundaries between Egypt and Palestine are being drawn.

Its name was linked once with the 1906 crisis between Egypt and the Ottoman state, which became known as the Taba crisis. Now, more than three quarters of a century later, the name of Taba has once again surfaced among the region's top events as an area over which a dispute over the same boundary line exists.

A documented historical study of the old crisis helps one become familiar with the principal features of the crisis that is now brewing over Taba and disrupting political relations in the region. It also helps all politicians and students of the problem by shedding light on the historical facts. That is

important in such political disputes because it is on the basis of such historical facts that claims collapse and rights are affirmed.

A careful reading of the documents of the crisis shows that it arose from a political agreement which provided for the Egyptian-Palestinian border to end at a point three miles west of the fortress of al-'Aqabah. There are eight miles between this fortress and Taba. This means quite simply that this border line is five miles away from Taba. How then can there be any doubt about this spot being Egyptian?

This induces us to set forth a set of assumptions that we think the Israelis have used as the basis for their political position, which contradicts historical facts and which may be set forth as follows:

1. Israel's access to the Gulf of Aqaba from the port of Elat and the small area surrounding it is too narrow, and that has been affecting Israel's economy, especially since Israel's volume of trade with countries to the south, in African as well as Asian markets, has grown. Now that signs of peace are beginning to appear in the region, the Israelis are hoping that as conditions become more peaceful, they can establish economic relations with the Arab world itself.

2. Taba is an important strategic center from which Sinai can be penetrated. On 30 January 1906 Mr Findlay, acting British commissioner in Cairo, wrote the following to describe the site: "Taba is an important site because it is located near the wells, and it commands the routes into Sinai from the headland of the Gulf of Aqaba. In addition, it commands the route to Gaza."

3. The Israelis are holding on to that section of Sinai to apply pressure on Egypt in their relationship with it. There are still many reasons for instability in Israel's relations with Egypt.

But the principal weakness that interferes with the success of any of Israel's objectives--the ones we assumed and the ones we didn't--is the historical fact that strips these objectives of their legitimacy. It is historical fact that will ultimately cause these objectives to fail either at the negotiating table or in a forum of international arbitration.

A study on the crisis that occurred on Egypt's eastern borders in 1906, which became known as the Taba crisis, is important for all the above reasons. We will be tracing this crisis in the following pages. In tracing the history of that crisis we tried to follow two related courses: the first is a course of study and the second is that of documents which confirm the truth of every word mentioned in that study.

In our efforts to stress the credibility of our study, we've relied principally on British documents because they are accurate and unbiased.

We've relied on two kinds of documents: first, the secret publications of the British Foreign Office. We used two volumes: volumes 64 and 65. The former contains a collection of documents pertaining to Egypt during the period from January to March of 1906; and the latter contains those documents that pertain to the period between April and June of the same year. Although we used these

documents in the study, we were unable to print them in full because the regulations of the Public Records Office in London prohibit us from doing that without getting prior permission.

The second group of documents we relied on in this study consists of a selected group from the first collection. These were documents that had been selected by the British Foreign Office and then presented to both houses of parliament. The selection was usually based on the principle of acquainting members of parliament with all aspects of a problem that was being dealt with. This collection was chosen in its entirety so it can manifest, show and constitute the more important part of the study's documents.

We believe that we have been fair to scientific truth in the efforts we made in this study.

May God grant us success.

The Author

## Part One: The Study

### An Introduction: Why Taba?

The question of Taba has come up twice in the course of three quarters of a century when the borders between Egypt and Palestine were being drawn. Each time the question came up, Taba created a crisis.

It may be curious to note that the first crisis, which arose between Egypt and Turkey, began over Taba; the second crisis, which is still unresolved, ends with Taba. And that raises a pressing question: why Taba?

The answer to that question requires a description of Taba and an explanation of its importance, and that is what the collection of documents we have is concerned with.

Let's begin with a description of Taba that was mentioned in a memorandum written by the acting British commissioner in Cairo to his government in London as the Taba crisis began to unfold. The commissioner wrote, "Taba is a spot on the western coast of the Gulf of Aqabah. It is located three or four miles inside the Egyptian borders. It is an important spot because of its proximity to wells and because it commands the routes that may be used to enter Sinai from the headland of the gulf. It also commands the route to Gaza." <sup>2</sup>

We get a sense of Taba's importance from what we can derive from the instructions that were issued to the inspector of the Sinai Peninsula regarding designating Egypt's eastern borders. These instructions, which were issued before the onset of the crisis, were included in another memorandum by the same man, Mr Findlay. The instructions stated:

"On 22 January, upon my approval, the Intelligence Department sent its instructions to Mr Bramley suggesting that he define the border posts as follows:

"1. At (Biyur): these are wells at the headland of the gulf owned by Egyptian Bedouins (20 soldiers and officers).

"2. At Naqab al-'Aqabah, a post that commands the route from the coast inland (10 men).

"3. At Taba, which commands the route along the coastline.

"Occupying these posts will enable us to keep al-'Aqabah under observation--there are 1,200 Turks there. It will block the routes between Egyptian and Turkish territory and prevent any force from going into the peninsula. Instructions have been issued to Mr Bramley to exercise the utmost care and caution in occupying these posts. Once these posts are occupied, he is to hold his ground unless force is used to compel him to retreat."

Elsewhere in the same memorandum Mr Findlay wrote: "I've given Mr Bramley the freedom to occupy those posts he thinks ought to be occupied, and I told him that as a matter of public policy, he could leave any low-lying posts at the headland of the gulf but that he had to occupy the other two posts: Naqab al-'Aqabah and Taba. These two posts are extremely important because they command the inland routes, and that would prevent Turkish emissaries from reaching the tribes in Sinai and perpetrating actions to agitate them."<sup>3</sup>

If the British were aware of Taba's importance, the other party, that is, the Ottomans, was certainly aware of it too. That was evident in the sequence of events and in the events related by the documents as well.

The Ottomans anticipated Egypt's attempt to establish a permanent presence in Taba and in the surrounding areas by going there unexpectedly. They thought that such an action would create a de facto situation that Egypt would not be able to change.

Throughout the crisis they held on to Taba tenaciously. That was evident in their positions and in the correspondence they sent to the khedive in Cairo or to the Egyptian commander in the area, Sa'd Bey Rif'at. In this correspondence they stated, "Taba is undoubtedly subordinate to the Sunni state, and Egyptian forces have no right to be there."<sup>4</sup>

The Ottomans used Taba as an arguing point and a pretext for making more claims on the Sinai Peninsula. In some of these claims they tried to shift the border line and to make it begin from al-'Arish and run to Ra's Muhammad. That would have meant quite simply that Egypt would be blocked once and for all from having a presence on the Gulf of Aqaba.<sup>5</sup>

When the Ottomans finally negotiated the matter of their departure from the areas they had occupied in Egyptian territory, they were willing to give up any spot except Taba.

In the course of his talks in February 1906 with the captain of the British ship Diana, the Turkish commander at Aqaba, Rushdi Pasha, said that, except for one or two posts, he was willing to withdraw his forces from Egyptian territory. Taba was the more important of the two.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Egyptians' and British occupation authorities' enthusiasm about holding on to Taba was not in any way less than that of the Ottoman invasion forces.

At an early time the Egyptians sent to the area an Egyptian force of 50 soldiers and officers who traveled there on board an Egyptian coast guard vessel, Nur al-Bahr. That force, which was led by Sa'd Bey Rif'at, tried to land in Taba. When Turkish troops prevented the Egyptians from landing, the Egyptians sailed south and landed on an island near the shore, a few miles from Taba. They landed on the island of Far'un where they continued to watch the situation in Taba closely. All Turkish attempts to induce Egyptian troops to move from Far'un Island failed.<sup>7</sup>

On the British side authorities in London sent the British warship Diana to the gulf where it sailed off the coast of al-'Aqabah for the purpose of containing the Turkish troops in Taba and preventing them from spreading outside the area. The warship was to liquidate that Turkish presence if diplomatic means should fail to get the Turkish troops out of the area.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the crisis which took place during the first half of 1906 became known as the Taba crisis was normal. This is the crisis whose developments we will be reading about in the following pages.

#### Chapter One: The Onset and Origins of the Crisis

Included in the territory that was to be managed by the "Egyptian province with its old borders," as stated in Muhammad 'Ali's executive decree of June 1841, were a few posts on the eastern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba. These were Daba, al-Muwaylah, and al-'Aqabah. These posts were to be administered by Egypt to safeguard the pilgrimage route over land between Egypt and al-Hijaz.

Although these routes had not been used since the Suez Canal was built in the latter sixties of the 19th century, these posts continued to be administered by Egyptians till 1892 when the first crisis over Sinai and the Gulf of Aqaba arose.

It is curious that this crisis began with early Zionist attempts to settle in some areas on the eastern coast of the gulf.

In 1890 a Jew called Paul Friedman visited Egypt. He contacted British occupation authorities in the country and informed them that he intended to emigrate to the shores of the gulf, and these authorities did not object.

Late the following year, in 1891, Friedman returned to Egypt with 20 German and Russian Jews, and they all landed on the shores of the gulf. However, all the circumstances were against that desperate attempt. Egyptian newspapers had sounded the alarm about the danger that was coming from Europe. Furthermore, Friedman and his group did not treat the natives there well. They purchased land in al-Muwaylah even though the laws of the Ottoman state prohibited the sale of land in the Arabian Peninsula to foreigners.<sup>9</sup>

This matter angered the Ottoman government which was not satisfied with expelling Friedman and his group from the region. Sultan 'Abd-al-Hamid the Second



took advantage of the death of Khedive Tawfiq early the following year, on 8 January 1892, and sent an executive decree installing 'Abbas the Second as Tawfiq's successor, on 17 January. He deliberately included in that decree a few references to the borders of the territory that was being administered by the khedive. His purpose in doing that was not only to deny Egypt the administration of the posts east of the Gulf of Aqaba--this territory had been given to Egypt to administer--but also to deny it part of its land, which is the Sinai Peninsula.

As soon as the British Commissioner in Cairo, Sir Evelyn Baring, who later became Lord Cromer, found out about the contents of the new executive decree, he asked the khedive and the Egyptian government not to read it. That decree meant:

1. An attempt was being made to violate the 1840-1841 settlement that had been guaranteed by the superpowers.
2. The Ottomans were getting dangerously close to the Suez Canal, and that threatened the British Empire's vital route.

During the winter of 1892 Britian applied considerable pressure on Istanbul. The Sublime Porte was finally forced to yield and to leave Sinai, which the Ottomans had tried to take away from Egypt and annex to the province of al-Hijaz.

This decision was made in the telegram that was sent on 8 April by Jawwad Pasha, the grand vizier, to Khedive 'Abbas the Second. Jawwad Pasha mentioned in that telegram, "As far as the Sinai Peninsula is concerned, its condition remains unchanged. It will be administered by the Egyptian khedive just as it had been administered under the administrations of your grandfather, Isma'il Pasha, and your father, Muhammad Tawfiq Pasha."<sup>10</sup>

Baring made that telegram public, and it came to be regarded as a supplement to the executive decree concerning the installation of the khedive. In order to avoid any misunderstanding of the meaning of the telegram, the British commissioner in Cairo presented a memorandum on 13 April to Tigran Pasha, Egypt's minister of foreign affairs. The British commissioner informed Egypt's foreign minister in that memorandum that he [i.e., the foreign minister] had to know that there can be no changes in relations between Egypt and the Sulbime Porte without the consent of the British government. The British commissioner added, "The grand vizier's telegram which you graciously showed me makes it clear that the Sinai Peninsula, which is the territory defined from the east by a line that runs in a southeasterly direction from a spot near east of al-'Arish to the headland of the Gulf of Aqaba, will remain under Egyptian administration. The fortress of al-'Aqabah, which is located east of that line will remain part of al-Hijaz Province."

That observation, which was approved by Lord Salisbury, the foreign secretary, along with another piece of correspondence pertaining to the executive decree that had to do with the khedive's installation, and a copy of the grand vizier's telegram were published in the official gazette, AL-WAQAI' AL-MISRIYAH. All these documents were sent to the British ambassador in Istanbul on the 14th of the same month.<sup>11</sup>

Since Britian did not want the dispute to remain a limited dispute between the

sultan and his subordinate, the khedive, and because it rather wanted the super-powers to intervene in the situation since the matter had to do with violating the 1840-1841 settlement that had been guaranteed by these countries, it sent copies of the executive decree, of the telegram, and of Baring's letter to Egypt's minister of foreign affairs to various countries and to the representatives of France and Russia in Cairo.

Mr Riverceau, the vice consul general of France in Cairo, responded on 14 April and said that, "The government of the Republic has charged its ambassador to the Sublime Porte to take up these two matters." The Russian consul, Mr (Kuyander), responded on the same day as well and said, "The ambassador of His Highness the Emperor in Constantinople has taken up the matter of these two written documents on behalf of the imperial government."<sup>12</sup>

And the problem settled down after that until 1906.

During those lengthy years, between 1892 and 1906, conditions in Egypt and elsewhere were changing rapidly in favor of the Ottoman state. Those who were in power in the Ottoman state were thus tempted early in 1906 to stir up once again the problem of Sinai and the Gulf of Aqaba.

1. First of all, the call to establish an Islamic League grew significantly. This call, which was fostered and encouraged by the Ottoman sultan, was very well received throughout the Islamic world.

2. At the same time railroad laying operations inside the Ottoman state increased, and especially the al-Hijaz railroad. One of the branches of this railroad was to be laid between Ma'an and al-'Aqabah. It was definitely desirable that this branch not be subjected to any "nearby foreign threat." That "nearby foreign threat" manifested itself in the British presence in Sinai which was a consequence of the British presence in Egypt.

3. Furthermore, the domestic front in Egypt was quite prepared for a daring Ottoman step against the British occupation of the country. During those years the National Party had grown significantly, and its leader, Mustafa Kamil, was clearly inclined to be loyal to the sultan and the Islamic League; his newspaper, AL-LIWA', advocated those principles in almost all issues.

4. In addition to all that the international climate was conducive to stirring up this problem so that the Egyptian problem in its entirety could be brought up and presented once again in international negotiations. During that era Germany had started emerging as a colonial power competing with the colonial alliance between the French and the British. An international conference was held in the Arabian Peninsula early in 1906, to be specific; it put the friendly accord which had been reached only 2 years earlier between France and Britain to a severe test.

In a lengthy memorandum about the crisis dated 21 May 1906 Cromer wrote, "The objective of the Turkish government is to test the power of the British position in Egypt and find out to what extent other countries will continue to help in that regard."<sup>13</sup> In an article published on 29 April in the French newspaper, LE TEMP, it was stated that "The secret intent of the Turkish policy is to open up

the entire Egyptian problem against Britain, and this is what Mr (Hanutu) tried to do during the (Fashudah) crisis."<sup>14</sup>

5. Finally, there is no doubt that the attitude of British authorities in Aden toward Yemen rebels had a most profound effect on the Ottoman sultan. Several reports were sent from Cairo to Istanbul during the summer and fall of 1905 affirming that the British government was helping Yemen rebels and providing them with weapons, ammunition and food. The reports stated that the British government was also helping deserters from the Turkish army. Cromer admitted in the aforementioned memorandum that British authorities in Aden had taken care of a large number of starving Turks who had fled from the army because it was not possible to let them die of hunger.<sup>15</sup>

Early signs of the crisis began when the author of an article which appeared on 9 December 1905 in AL-LIWA' newspaper, warned that British occupation authorities were preparing the desert in Sinai for "important military operations. In mid 1905 the Ministry of War began drawing up plans for these operations."

The author of the article warned further against the actions of these authorities, and he spoke about the significance of appointing a British citizen, who was Col Bramley, commander for Mount Sinai. The author of the article also discussed the allocation of 88,000 pounds in the following year's budget for reclaiming the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>16</sup>

A short time after that, on 17 December, the governor of Syria wrote to Istanbul and told authorities there that the Egyptian government had decided to build military barracks in the area between al-'Aqabah and al-Qasimah. He added that British occupation forces would participate in the construction of these barracks.

The sultan responded on the same day, asking the governor to forestall the Egyptians and set up Ottoman guard posts in the same area.<sup>17</sup>

Cromer maintains that the only British citizen who was in Sinai at that time was Mr Bramley, who had been appointed a short time earlier civilian inspector for the region. At that time there wasn't a single British or Egyptian soldier east of Suez.<sup>18</sup>

Blunt explains the reasons behind sending Bramley to Sinai. "Bramley, who had not been previously employed by the government, had attracted Cromer's attention after making several successful expeditions in the Libyan desert traveling on the backs of camels. This induced the British commissioner in Cairo to employ this young man in the Egyptian government as an inspector in Sinai, and he sent him to the peninsula 'to find out how true were the reports that had been received in Cairo about the sultan's intention to lay a new branch of al-Hijaz railroad from Ma'anto al-'Aqabah'."<sup>19</sup>

To avoid arousing the suspicions of Turkish authorities, the Egyptian government meanwhile requested that the sultan appoint a committee of Turks and Egyptians to define the borders between Sinai and Syria. But the sultan took no action on that request.<sup>20</sup>

Instead of sending a response to Egypt, the Sublime Porte sent a letter to the British Embassy in Istanbul on 12 January 1906, complaining that a British officer leading an Egyptian army force had set up camp at al-'Aqabah on the road to Gaza and had declared his intention to build guard posts at that point and elsewhere on Turkish territory.

The Ottoman government asked Sir Nicholas O'Connor, the British ambassador to take the necessary steps to have those forces withdrawn from the post they occupied outside Egyptian territory.

To calm down the sultan Sir O'Connor informed him that the purpose of that delegation was to explore with local Turkish authorities in a friendly manner the status of some designated posts that are located on the borders and whose positions have never been determined.<sup>21</sup>

On the same day that O'Connor wrote to Cromer inquiring about the true situation --that was on 13 January--reports from Sinai were received in Cairo about an attack on the area by Turkish forces.

Instructions were immediately issued from the British commissioner in Cairo to Col Bramley asking him to advance to the area adjacent to al-'Aqabah and to get in touch with the Turkish commander there and find out the reasons for all these suspicions that had manifested themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Cromer's response to the British ambassador in Istanbul was received on 15 January; it stated that "Disturbances are expected to continue until the borders are defined." Cromer asked the British ambassador in Istanbul "to support the khedive's suggestion that a Turkish emissary and an Egyptian representative be appointed to define the borders."<sup>23</sup>

But the Ottoman state continued to oppose the idea of defining the borders. Its reply was always "The Sublime Porte will not appoint an emissary because there is no border problem; there is rather aggression on Ottoman territory, and that cannot be tolerated."<sup>24</sup>

AL-LIWA' expressed the opinion of Mukhtar Pasha, the Turkish high commissioner in Cairo on this subject: "As long as Egypt remains a Turkish province, there can be no boundaries and borders between it and the rest of the provinces that are directly subject to Turkish administration."<sup>25</sup>

O'Connor's opinion on that regard was this: "Since the sultan was extremely sensitive about the Egyptian question, I became convinced that it was futile to try to induce him to agree to appoint a joint committee on the borders...."<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, the British ambassador in Istanbul thought at first that the crisis ought to be frozen. He wrote, "If we do not insist that the borders be defined, the matter will not turn into a serious crisis."<sup>27</sup>

However, British authorities in Cairo thought that as a result of the Turkish government's refusal to define the borders, Egyptian posts on these borders had to be safeguarded. Accordingly, a decision was made to send a small Egyptian force made up of 50 men and led by an Egyptian officer, Sa'd Bey Rif'at, to meet

with Mr Bramley on the borders near al-'Aqabah. The Egyptian force would also occupy Taba, that important spot that is located on the western coast of the gulf, about 5 miles from the fortress of al-'Aqabah by sea and 8 miles by land.

At the same time instructions were issued to Mr Bramley to occupy Naqab al-'Aqabah and al-Qitar, which command the mountain through which the inland road from the coast to Mount Sinai lies.

This small force advanced toward Taba on board the Egyptian coast guard vessel, Nur al-Bahr, because transportation across the desert and the mountain ranges of Sinai was extremely difficult. But before receiving new instructions, Mr Bramley received several warnings from the Turkish commander who was in a place called Umm Rashrash. Therefore, he returned to his post in Nakhl and sent the required report. But as soon as he received those instructions, he rushed back immediately to the gulf and headed to Taba to greet the force that would be arriving there. As soon as he arrived in Taba, he was taken by surprise by a meeting that was held on board the Egyptian coast guard vessel between the British captain of the ship and the commander of the Egyptian force on one side and the commander of a Turkish force that had already occupied the post, on the other side.

The Turkish commander declared that he had unequivocal orders to prevent any force from landing in Taba even if he had to use force.

But since the orders that had been issued to the Egyptian officer Sa'd Bey Rif'at had warned him against a clash unless he was fired upon, he withdrew to Far'un Island, which is very close to the western shore of the gulf, a few miles south of Taba. Sa'd Bey Rif'at withdrew to Far'un Island because he did not have a large enough force to land on the island forcibly. There he waited for the situation to clear up.<sup>28</sup>

At that time and during the second half of January 1906, while Cromer was in Sudan to inaugurate the port of Port Sudan, there was an obvious political change in the situation when the grand vizier sent the khedive three successive telegrams that used violent and threatening language.

The first of these telegrams demanded that Egypt stop setting up these posts; it also declared that a Turkish representative would not be sent to define the borders.

The second telegram stated that Turkish territory included not only al-'Aqabah, but also areas adjacent to it, including Taba. The telegram stated that these areas were not part of territory that "had been granted to Egypt." The grand vizier complained about the fact that an armed Egyptian vessel, Nur al-Bahr, had been sent to Taba with soldiers on board. The grand vizier concluded his telegram by saying something to the effect that Egypt itself was part of Turkey and that, therefore, there was no reason to define borders between Egyptian and Turkish territory. If Egypt persisted in sending men to land in those areas to set up posts there, "such a violation of orders will require that the most severe measures be taken to stop it."

Ottoman violence was escalated in the third telegram which demanded that Nur

al-Bahr and the Egyptian force on Fir'awn Island be withdrawn and that construction of the posts be halted. Otherwise, "A crisis will occur."<sup>29</sup>

In response to this Turkish threat Mr Findley, the official acting on Cromer's behalf during his absence, offered specific suggestions and asked that they be implemented promptly.

From a diplomatic standpoint, he asked that instructions be sent to the British ambassador in Istanbul to lodge a protest with the Sublime Porte about:

1. The sultan's refusal to agree to a joint committee on the borders.
2. The sultan's clear wish to ignore the telegram of 8 April 1892 in which no mention was made of the area surrounding al-'Aqabah.
3. The grand vizier's threats to use force against Egyptian posts which he believed existed on Turkish territory.

Findley also suggested that the sultan be informed that Egypt wanted to administer peacefully the territories that had been designated Egyptian territory in 1892. The sultan was to be informed that if the Egyptian posts were threatened, the Egyptian government will have to ask the British government for assistance.

From a military standpoint Findley asked that orders be issued to the British warship, Diana, which was then in Port Sudan, to advance to al-'Aqabah.

He also sent instructions to Bramley and Sa'd Bey Rif'at asking them to occupy the following positions in case of a Turkish attack on them.

1. The Buyur wells located on the headland of the Gulf of Aqaba; these wells were owned by Egyptian bedouins.
2. Naqab al-'Aqabah, which is the principal approach post from the coast inland.
3. Taba, which the Turks had reached before the Egyptians.

At the same time, however, Mr Findley also cautioned Bramley and Sa'd Bey Rif'at to avoid stirring up hostilities as much as possible.

It became obvious that it was no longer possible to solve the problem locally, and Bramley and Rif'at had to be notified that talks on that matter between Cairo, London and Istanbul would begin so that a suitable solution could be reached.<sup>30</sup>

## Chapter Two: The Negotiations

The following period, which came after the grand vizier's telegrams on 25 January and lasted until matters developed into a political crisis during the second half of April and the first half of May, may be divided as follows:

## First, Preliminary Talks and Their Outcome

Cromer thought that British policy in the negotiations that were to be conducted with the Ottoman state ought to follow the following three lines:

1. Whether or not the Turks were backing the Germans, the British should not become concerned if the Turks were to threaten to expel Egyptian forces camped inside Egyptian territory.
2. The British ought to insist that a joint committee on the borders be appointed without wasting any time.
3. Turkish troops must withdraw from the Egyptian posts they had occupied.<sup>31</sup>

Sir O'Connor met with the Turkish foreign minister in Istanbul on 28 January and relayed to him these demands. He told him that the consequences of a delay in defining the borders would be grave, and he asked the minister that orders be sent to the Turkish commander in al-'Aqabah to evacuate the Egyptian posts.

Tawfiq Pasha, the foreign minister, told Sir O'Connor that the Turkish Council of Ministers was meeting that evening and that he would relay to the council the British ambassador's opinions and demands. He promised Sir O'Connor that he would make an effort to reach a satisfactory agreement.<sup>32</sup>

The foreign minister contacted Sir O'Connor the following morning and told him that the problem had been settled. A telegram had arrived from the commander at al-'Aqabah reporting that an understanding had been reached after a meeting with the commander of the British troops there and that a satisfactory agreement on the problem had been reached.<sup>33</sup>

On the same day, however, Cairo denied that any agreement had been reached. Findley thought that that report from Cairo was due to the fact that "The sultan was influenced by the strong tone the British ambassador had used in his talks with the foreign minister."<sup>34</sup>

It seems that the reason behind the report that was received by Turkish authorities was a letter that Rushdi Pasha, commander of the forces in al-'Aqabah, had sent to Sa'd Bey Rif'at, commander of the Egyptian forces. Rushdi Pasha stated in that letter that he and Sa'd Bey were "fellow officers serving the same sultan. Since the Sublime Porte has already explained the matter in detail to His Highness Khedive Isma'il of Egypt, there is no dispute between us." Then Rushdi Pasha asked Sa'd Bey to advance to Suez and to resolve the matter in a fraternal manner.<sup>35</sup>

At any rate, the Turkish ambassador in London, Musurus Pasha once again explained that the agreement that was being referred to involved nothing more than a few clarifications that had been exchanged between the Turkish commander in al-'Aqabah and the Egyptian commander who had been sent there.<sup>36</sup>

In Cairo Findley was so optimistic about the possibility that the Sublime Porte may retract its position, that he began looking for a justification for the sultan's retraction: he could have confused Daba, which is located on the

eastern shore of the gulf, with Taba, which is located on the western shore. But despite such optimism, all hopes were dashed before the end of the month when Mukhtar Pasha spoke with the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs and told him that the statement, "The status of the Sinai Peninsula will remain unchanged," which was mentioned in the grand vizier's telegram of 8 April 1892, meant that Sinai was an annexed province, that it is the property of the sultan and that it is quite distinct from Egypt's other territories."<sup>37</sup>

Events in the region that was being disputed, in Taba and the areas around it, were progressing in a manner that called upon the British government to assume a more vehement position with the Sublime Porte. This brings us to the area around the gulf so we can see how the situation developed there.

#### Second, the Local Situation and the Turkish Occupation of Other Posts

During the first half of February the Turks proceeded to strengthen their positions in al-'Aqabah and the areas around it in a manner that caused the London government and British authorities in Cairo to become quite concerned.

Early that month news was received from reliable sources that two Turkish infantry brigades were advancing toward al-'Aqabah.<sup>38</sup>

On 11 February a collection of reports from Bramley was received in Cairo. In those reports Bramley talked about the threats that were made by the Turkish commander against the Egyptian post on Fir'awn Island. That was why he did not give the coast guard vessel, Nur al-Bahr, permission to return to Suez so it can help protect the Egyptian post.

The British inspector's reports also mentioned that the Turks had occupied other posts on Egyptian territory on the western coast of the gulf. These were Naqab al-'Aqabah, al-Qitar and Taba, which they had occupied earlier.

The Turkish commander in al-'Aqabah informed Bramley and Sa'd Rif'at that he would not be able to continue contacting them in the future because he did not recognize the post which they had occupied on Turkish territory.<sup>39</sup>

And the Turks made further threats. A few days after they broke communications with the Egyptian post on Fir'awn Island, the Ottoman commander sent a message informing Egyptians on Fir'awn Island that he was holding them responsible for the consequences of turning down numerous requests to withdraw from the island.

As a result, instructions were issued to the Egyptian commander, and these instructions reiterated and affirmed that he had to maintain his control over the island because it was a natural and a strong port. The British inspector also warned the Turkish commander against allowing his troops to come to the areas near the island.<sup>40</sup>

These developments in the disputed area brought about an obvious change in British diplomatic methods: the method of understanding was being changed to one of applying strong political pressure so that a prompt solution to the problem could be reached.



### Third, British Diplomatic Pressure

The British began playing their favorite game under such circumstances: they began applying political pressure. That was the result of the wish expressed by Mukhtar Pasha that Sinai have "a special position" different from that of the rest of Egypt. And that meant that the sultan considered himself to be at liberty to interpret the telegram of 8 April as he saw fit.<sup>41</sup> The British began applying political pressure as a result of the vehemence that became evident in the conduct of Turkish authorities in the disputed area.

On 29 January O'Connor met the grand vizier and presented him with a strongly worded protest to the Turkish forces' occupation of Taba and to the fact that instructions had been sent to the Turkish commander to deny Egyptian forces permission to land in Taba.

O'Connor concluded his protest by stating that the Turks had no right to occupy a spot that was undoubtedly considered Egyptian territory. He advised that Turkish forces should be withdrawn promptly so that an impending critical crisis can be avoided.<sup>42</sup>

Two days later, Sir Edward Grey summoned the Turkish ambassador in London and informed him that if the existing situation were to continue, endless disturbances would ensue.<sup>43</sup>

When the British ambassador in Istanbul thought he might suggest that the forces of both sides be withdrawn from the area until the problem is resolved, Cromer rejected that idea and insisted on adhering to Egypt's right to occupy Taba as soon as the Turks left it. Cromer thought that the only concession that could be made to the sultan was "a promise not to interfere in the railroad in any way."<sup>44</sup>

O'Connor did not in fact make any concessions to the grand vizier after Cromer's telegram was received. He only promised that the railroad would be safeguarded.<sup>45</sup> Once again he began applying pressure so that a friendly agreement on the problem could be reached without any political complications.

As a result of the fact that such pressure was maintained, the grand vizier promised that the council would meet 2 days later to discuss the problem.<sup>46</sup>

But as soon as the aforementioned council meeting was adjourned without reaching any conclusion, the British government took two specific steps immediately.

First, it submitted an official protest to the Turkish ambassador in London at the end of which it stated, "...and we are fully determined to effect the prompt evacuation of the posts that are occupied by Ottoman troops on territories that are managed by the khedive. Instructions to that effect have been issued to His Majesty's ambassador in Istanbul.

The British government is confident that the Sublime Porte will see, after the recent developments, that the borders have to be defined and that a joint committee has to be appointed for that purpose."<sup>47</sup>

Second, the British government escalated its political threats to the point of sending a British warship to the gulf.

The fact is that Cromer had been insisting since late January that such a measure be taken since it would constitute a factor of some importance in the situation.<sup>48</sup> It was a result of Cromer's insistence on such a measure that a decision was made to keep the two warships, Diana and Minerva, in Suez and Port Said, respectively, so they could respond to a request from British authorities in Cairo.<sup>49</sup>

On 14 February, 1 day after the official protest was presented to the Turkish ambassador, instructions were issued to Lord Cromer authorizing him to advance Diana to al-'Aqabah.<sup>50</sup> Cromer issued that order immediately.

Since the essential aim of that measure was above all else to exercise political influence on what was happening, a memorandum was presented on the same day to Musurus Pasha informing him that the British government had decided to send one of its warships to Fir'awn Island, within sight of Taba, as a result of continued threats to the Egyptian post from the Turkish commander at al-'Aqabah. The British government was doing this to prevent any aggression on Egyptian territory.<sup>51</sup>

The British plan produced results quickly. As soon as news reached Istanbul that Diana might advance to the Gulf of Aqaba, a military council was held in Yaldiz on the same day to look into the problem of withdrawing Ottoman troops from Taba and other posts and to look into the conduct of the Turkish commander in al-'Aqabah.<sup>52</sup>

Since no news about the outcome of that meeting was received until the evening of the following day--15 February--Sir O'Connor decided to send one of his aides to the palace to inquire. Mr Lamb met with the sultan's first secretary who told him that the council had reached a decision that "The territories that are being managed by Egypt in accordance with the decrees do not include the areas that are the subject of the dispute."<sup>53</sup>

That response caused the British ambassador in Istanbul to become extremely disappointed. The British ambassador learned from his private sources that the reason for that decision was a telegram that had been received from Mukhtar Pasha in Cairo reminding the sultan that the British had proposed an idea during the 1892 negotiations whose aim was to extend the Turkish-Egyptian administrative borders from Ra's Muhammad to al-'Arish.<sup>54</sup>

When Cromer received this news, he strongly objected to the idea and stated, "Egypt is entitled to administer Sinai because the sultan gave the khedive of Egypt that right." The British commissioner in Cairo thought the talks ought to be extended so that the effect of Diana's advance toward al-'Aqabah could be determined. He also wanted to discuss the reasons that led the War Office to reduce the number of occupation forces in Egypt at this critical time.

He thought that these forces ought to have been increased if the talks were to become heated.<sup>55</sup>

At any rate, despite the military council's decision, the sultan soon sent a

friendly letter to Sir O'Connor informing him that he intended to send a committee of Ottoman civil servants to ascertain the location of the posts that are being disputed. He said he would withdraw his troops if it is established that these posts are located on territory administered by the Egyptian government.

The British ambassador received that encouraging letter, and he wrote back to the sultan and told him that if an Egyptian representative were to become a member of that committee and if Turkish troops were to leave these posts, he would recommend--to prove the British government's good intentions toward Turkey --that British forces not occupy it until an agreement on the matter is reached.<sup>56</sup>

But what happened when this Turkish committee was formed and when it took action was enough to bring nothing more than new disappointment to the British.

#### Fourth, the Turkish Committee

During the following month, between mid February and mid March, the committee that the sultan had suggested sending to the disputed area to find out what the facts were became the principal factor in the situation.

It was as a result of the British misunderstanding of the nature of this committee that its arrival did not help solve the problem. Instead, the committee complicated the problem further and brought the situation closer to a crisis.

While the British viewed this committee as one having broad powers to investigate, negotiate and reach agreements, the sultan had formed it so it would serve merely as a fact-finding committee. It was in light of that British view that O'Connor, as soon as the Ottomans made that suggestion to him, asked that a representative of the Egyptian government become a member of that committee. When the two [Turkish] committee members arrived in Cairo and did not get in touch with the Egyptian government, the British ambassador in Istanbul applied pressure on officials there so they would send "specific instructions to the Ottoman envoys to enter into negotiations with the Egyptian government."<sup>57</sup>

British authorities in Cairo went so far as to form the Egyptian committee that was to undertake these talks with the Ottoman representatives. That committee was made up of Sirhank Pasha, Sa'd Bey Rif'at and Cpt Owen, chief of Egyptian intelligence. Cpt Owen would be the one, and that was Cromer's idea, who would "actually conduct the talks."<sup>58</sup>

Let us now trace this committee's steps and its fate. One day after the sultan proposed that he send a representative to inquire about the true location of the disputed posts, the Turkish foreign minister informed Sir O'Connor that a telegram had been sent to Mukhtar Pasha instructing him to go to al-'Aqabah promptly to look into the problem of the borders.

But the British ambassador in Istanbul rejected that idea and declared that his government was not comfortable with the fact that Mukhtar Pasha in particular had been chosen for that role.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of that rejection the Ottoman government changed its mind and

decided that instead of the Turkish High Commissioner in Cairo, it would select two Turkish officers for the mission. At the same time it demanded that the ship, Diana, be withdrawn in return for sending the Turkish commander in al-'Aqabah orders not to interfere in the affairs of Far'un Island. However, the British government did not heed that demand.<sup>60</sup>

At any rate the two officers who were selected, Muzaffar Bey and Fahmi Afandi, left Istanbul in the morning, on 20 February, and their destination was Alexandria.<sup>61</sup> As soon as they arrived in Cairo they went to Mukhtar Pasha's residence: they went into the house and did not appear outside. The two Ottoman representatives were not seen anywhere until the first of March. They made no attempt to contact any Egyptian or British official, especially since at that time the khedive was on a trip in the desert, and he was supposed to return from that trip on 4 March.<sup>62</sup>

As a result of that standstill the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked its ambassador in Istanbul to apply pressure to the Sublime Porte so that the envoys would take action.<sup>63</sup> O'Connor requested an audience with the sultan the following day, and he asked that the Ottoman envoys be instructed to begin talks with the Egyptian government.<sup>64</sup>

It was on 3 March, however, 1 day before the khedive was to return from his trip--that orders from Constantinople were issued to the two officers. They were ordered to travel immediately to al-'Aqabah via Beirut and from there to Syria, Amman and al-'Aqabah.

British officials had not expected that. AL-MUQATTAM, the occupation's mouth-piece at the time, stated, "The action of Sultan 'Abd-al-Hamid's government was surprising and bewildering to all those who learned of it."<sup>65</sup>

The British government was both astonished and furious. It decided to express its anger by presenting a strongly worded memorandum on the same day the two Turkish envoys were to arrive in al-'Aqabah, demanding that Ottoman troops be withdrawn from Taba promptly.<sup>66</sup>

Before that British memorandum was presented, a protest telegram had been sent by the khedive to the sultan because the two envoys had left the country without contacting him. The khedive reminded the sultan of his protest over the Turkish forces' occupation of Egyptian territory.<sup>67</sup>

The Ottoman government responded to these protests by reinforcing its forces in al-'Aqabah; it sent a brigade and a half of infantry men there.<sup>68</sup> Mukhtar Pasha also informed the khedive in a meeting the two men held on 12 March that the two Turkish envoys were not authorized to take any independent action and that they had been sent to help him.<sup>69</sup> But the Ottoman government's response to the British government's protests was always a request that the British government wait till the envoys' reports arrived from al-'Aqabah.

At that time British officials deliberated with each other about sending another warship to al-'Aqabah for the purpose of applying more pressure on the sultan.<sup>70</sup>

Sir Edward Grey approved of the idea even though he thought that Istanbul should

be informed first that British officials intended to send another warship to al-'Aqabah if Turkish troops did not withdraw completely and promptly from Taba and from Egyptian territories.<sup>71</sup>

As soon as Turkey was informed of that decision, its representatives in Cairo and al-'Aqabah took action.

In Cairo Mukhtar Pasha induced AL-AHRAM to publish a news report that the Turks would send a force to Nakhl to protect the gateways to the Gulf of Aqaba, just as Britain was safeguarding the gateways to the Gulf of Suez.<sup>72</sup> At the same time he cabled the sultan urging him not to yield to the British threat and to hold on to the occupied posts.<sup>73</sup>

In al-'Aqabah Rushdi Pasha, the Turkish commander, informed Cpt Hornby, master of the warship Diana that he insisted that the borders be extended from Suez to Rafah. Rushdi Pasha said that on behalf of his government, he did not recognize the telegram of 8 April 1892.<sup>74</sup>

The response to a severe British protest that was delivered to Musurus Pasha on 21 March,<sup>75</sup> was this: the Sublime Porte informed Sir O'Connor that it would not agree to exchanging memoranda with the British government regarding Egyptian borders because this was a problem that concerned Turkey and Egypt only.<sup>76</sup>

The Turkish envoys soon sent their report to Istanbul affirming that Taba was located on Turkish territory.<sup>77</sup> After the contents of this report were known, Mukhtar Pasha requested that talks be held with the khedive to resolve the problem.<sup>78</sup>

Since the decision to send another British ship had been delayed as a result of a few administrative disputes between the navy and the Foreign Office;<sup>79</sup> and since members of the House of Commons had begun demanding that the entire matter be turned to arbitration, something the British government did not want because it would entail lengthy political complications;<sup>80</sup> and since there was still some hope that the problem could be resolved through negotiations, the British thought they would grant conditional approval to the proposed negotiations.

The first condition: Mukhtar Pasha had to receive official authorization from Istanbul to negotiate with the khedive.<sup>81</sup>

The second condition: The meetings that will be held concerning these negotiations must be attended by the khedive's chief administrator and his foreign minister.<sup>82</sup>

Although these two conditions were met, British officials in Cairo or Istanbul expressed their pessimism about the outcome of these negotiations. They said that to the Turks these negotiations were nothing more than "an attempt to waste time."<sup>83</sup>

This brings us to the last stage of the attempts that were made to solve the problem before it became a crisis, and that is the negotiations stage.

## Fifth, the Egyptian-Turkish Negotiations

The first meeting between Mukhtar Pasha on the one hand, and the khedive, his chief of staff and his foreign minister, on the other, took place on Wednesday, 11 April 1906.

The Turkish High Commissioner laid all the Turkish cards on the table at that meeting. Although Mukhtar Pasha admitted that the problem had to be interpreted on the basis of the 8 April 1892 telegram, his interpretation of that telegram was based on the following:

1. The Sinai Peninsula consists only of territory located south of the straight line between al-'Aqabah and Suez. Since Taba is located south of that line, Mukhtar Pasha recognizes it as a spot that is located on the peninsula and hence in Egypt.

2. The borders of Egyptian territory north of that area run parallel to a line between Rafah and Suez. But territory that is bordered on the northwest by the line between Rafah and Suez and to the south by the line from Suez to al-'Aqabah and to the east by a line from al-'Aqabah to Rafah is Turkish territory.

Mukhtar Pasha spoke about the fact that the sultan was placing much importance on the proposed border line because he wanted to lay a railroad to al-'Aqabah, and he wanted other railroad lines to branch out from that line to Suez and Port Said.

But the Turkish High Commissioner deliberately corrected that statement and declared that he could, despite the Sublime Porte's wishes, conclude a treaty that would be based on the fact that the border run directly from Rafah to Ra's Muhammad. Thus, the entire western coast of the Gulf of Aqaba would be within Turkish territory.<sup>84</sup>

In Cromer's opinion, complying with the sultan's request meant that "Construction of a railroad all the way to the shores of the Suez Canal would be allowed. The construction process would, of course, be conducted under the supervision of the Germans, and that would have a direct effect on Britain's interests. It was a matter of considerable importance. Not only would that threaten Egypt's freedom, but it could also pose a grave Turkish threat to the freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal, and that would be done in compliance with the demands of another European country."<sup>85</sup>

However, agreeing to Mukhtar Pasha's request would mean:

1. Closing the Gulf of Aqaba. The navigable channel that leads into that gulf is 400 yards wide, and the Turks can build a fortress at Ra's Nuzerani (an area in Sharm al-Shaykh). That would make it almost impossible for British ships to have access to the gulf. In effect, that would turn the gulf into a closed Turkish body of water, and the route to India would be threatened by the use of torpedo boats which can easily be dispatched in units from al-'Aqabah.

2. Not only would the Turkish borders be only 100 miles away from Suez, they

would also be very close to Nakhl, which is a very important strategic center that could always pose a threat to Egypt.

3. The Arab tribes that have always been under the Egyptian administration will come under a Turkish administration, and that measure could cause major difficulties in the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>86</sup>

Consequently, it was decided that all Turkish points of view were to be rejected; the negotiations that were begun by Mukhtar Pasha were to be broken; and talks were to be conducted directly with Istanbul.

On Cromer's advice the khedive sent his reply to Mukhtar Pasha's suggestions; he sent a lengthy telegram to the grand vizier on 14 April informing him that the only means by which an acceptable agreement may be reached was that of using the 8 April 1892 [sic] telegram as the basis for negotiating. The khedive said that if there were a few specific spots whose status was doubtful, engineers could survey the border line between Rafah and al-'Aqabah. Instead of having that line end at the fortress of al-'Aqabah, it can continue to a point on the gulf coast, not less than 3 miles west of the fortress.

The khedive concluded his telegram by saying that if his suggestions are accepted, Taba would become Egyptian territory, and Turkish troops would then have to withdraw from there.<sup>87</sup>

Nothing worth noting happened for over 1 week. But suddenly all the agencies of the Ottoman state began making efforts to force the situation to develop into a crisis. According to Sir Edward Grey, "It seemed that Sultan 'Abd-al-Hamid was anxious to issue an ultimatum."<sup>88</sup>

### Chapter Three: The Crisis

The first reaction to the khedive's 14 April telegram to the grand vizier came in a lengthy telegram from the latter dated 22 April, 8 days later. The grand vizier mentioned in his telegram that the territories named in the imperial decree did not include Sinai or the Gulf of Aqaba and that the 8 April 1892 telegram, which is considered an annex to the installation decree, referred only to the western section of Sinai. The grand vizier went on to say that a decision had been made to establish a province and an administrative district at al-'Aqabah. He said that the khedive had to take appropriate steps to bring an end to this problem and that he was not to allow any foreign intervention of any kind.<sup>89</sup>

At the same time a personal letter from the sultan to the khedive was received; it bore the same message and reiterated the demand that "this matter be brought to an end, that foreigners not be given an opportunity to intervene, and that the restoration of al-'Aqabah's affiliation with the province of al-Hijaz be completed in accordance with Your Honorable well-informed practice."<sup>90</sup>

On 25 April Mukhtar Pasha requested a meeting with the khedive. That meeting was attended by the chief administrator and the foreign affairs chief, but the Turkish High Commissioner made no new suggestions at that meeting. Instead, he threatened. He stated that it must be understood that the matter would not be

looked into any further and that the Ottoman government's orders had to be obeyed.<sup>91</sup>

On the same day there was another attack on the Egyptian borders. AL-MUQATTAM's correspondent in al-'Arish cabled that Ottoman soldiers had removed "the marble pillars that had been installed at the Rafah post to serve as fixed borders between the Egyptian government and Sultan 'Abd-al-Hamid's government. Although the khedive's name and the date of his visit to that post had been carved on the pillars, the Turkish soldiers threw those pillars on the ground and showed no regard for the name of the honorable person carved on them."<sup>92</sup>

Cromer wired the news to London, and he stated that the people of al-'Arish had expressed their dismay because of that incident.<sup>93</sup>

Reports were also received in Cairo indicating that the Turkish garrison in al-'Aqabah had received more combat supplies and reinforcements. Rushdi Pasha, the commander of that garrison, stated that he intended to advance toward Nakhla.

In addition to all that, Egyptian newspapers supporting the Islamic League intensified their campaign against Britain's position, causing Cromer to write then that "It is possible now that any small incident could turn into a raging religious revolution."<sup>94</sup>

Faced with all these Turkish measures, the British government had to assume a firm position. Therefore, in the course of a few days in late April and early May, it began to formulate the idea of issuing an ultimatum to the Ottoman government. And that brings us to the story of those days.

#### Preliminaries to the Ultimatum

The British Commissioner in Cairo had been considering taking decisive action against the Turks since late March. Cromer rejected any idea that might be interpreted in any way as yielding to all or some of the sultan's demands because "yielding to the sultan's demands and breaking the conditions of the decree would have the worst effects." Nevertheless, Cromer asked that actions be slow and deliberate. "It would be desirable to give his majesty every opportunity to yield to our protests so that if we find ourselves compelled to take any decisive action, he will have no excuse."<sup>95</sup>

The idea of making no concessions was reiterated by the British ambassador in Istanbul 1 month later. He thought that "such action would be regarded as a sign of weakness and would increase the difficulties that we are facing."<sup>96</sup>

But before the required "decisive action" was taken, the British government had to look into two matters. First, it had to safeguard its international and local position before taking such a measure. Second, it had to decide on the kind of measure that it would want to take.

#### 1. Safeguarding the International and Local Position

A. The International Situation: Since the timing of the crisis coincided with the date of the second Peninsula Conference in January 1906, the British thought



that Germany was trying to distract them by forcing the sultan to create a crisis.<sup>97</sup>

Suspensions about Germany's posture grew as a result of the fact that the press campaign against the British was accompanied by articles that were full of praise for the German state. AL-LIWA' in particular carried many of those articles; its editor-in-chief, Mustafa Kamil had visited Germany during that period and had resided there for some time.

Through its ambassadors in London and Istanbul France had expressed its willingness from the outset to offer every possible assistance to the British.<sup>98</sup>

After the Peninsula Conference ended in April the situation changed completely so that matters were in Britain's favor. With regard to Germany, Count Metternich, Germany's ambassador in London, offered the British foreign secretary assurances that the German government was not giving the Turkish government any assistance or support in its position on the Taba problem. He denied the charges that had been made in the British press to that effect.<sup>99</sup>

The French government's position was expressed by the newspaper, LE TEMP, in an article that appeared on 28 April in the newspaper. The article stated that the French government was "in total agreement with Britain regarding the Egyptian-Turkish border problem. The French government will carry out all the obligations it assumed as a result of the 8 April 1904 agreement. The French government's British friends can expect the same friendly assistance from France as that which France offered at the Peninsula Conference."<sup>100</sup>

The British foreign secretary held numerous meetings on 30 April with the ambassadors of friendly countries. He met first with Mr (Cambeau) and informed him of the situation. The French ambassador thought that a strong measure had to be used with the Turks.<sup>101</sup> The British foreign secretary also met with the Russian ambassador who thought that his government had to be notified of the situation immediately.<sup>102</sup>

Both governments' responses were extremely encouraging. Not only did the French government offer its support, but also the French ambassador in St Petersburg, Mr Boutiron, discussed the matter with Count Lamsadroff, the Russian foreign minister. As a result, the Russian foreign minister sent instructions to Mr Zinovyev, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul, to coordinate his efforts with his two colleagues, the French and British ambassadors, in applying pressure on the Sublime Porte.

Count Lamsadroff told the British ambassador, Mr Rice, that he would like to see the three embassies in Istanbul take common action.<sup>103</sup>

The French ambassador also formally informed the British that his government had sent instructions to its ambassador in Istanbul to use all his influence to force the sultan to agree to British demands.<sup>104</sup>

The international climate was thus set for Britain to take that "decisive measure."

B. The Local Situation: Since the possibilities that reactions in Egypt to that expected measure were significant, it was thought that the numbers of the British occupation army in Egypt should be increased before such a measure is taken.<sup>105</sup>

Since early April Cromer had been pressing for such an increase in the British garrison in Egypt as a means of applying pressure on the sultan.<sup>106</sup> When the crisis became imminent, the British commissioner became more persistent that his demand to increase the numbers of the occupation army be met. He thought that the force that was in Egypt at that time was adequate for controlling Cairo and Alexandria only. But what about the rest of the country?<sup>107</sup>

The British Foreign Office soon approved a decision to send the required troops. It thought that that decision should be made public so that it would have its required effect on public opinion inside Egypt.<sup>108</sup>

On 26 April orders were issued to three military units to take off from Crete and go to Cairo. They were reinforced by another force from Malta. Besides, a British artillery unit was also sent from Britain. These forces were to be mobilized before the end of the month.<sup>109</sup> Most of these forces did in fact arrive in Egypt before that "decisive measure" was taken.

British authorities in Cairo proceeded to strengthen their domestic position by taking another measure. They decided to confront the Turks' destruction of the border posts at Rafah promptly. Therefore, Cromer suggested that the warship, Minerva, which was then docked in Port Said, be dispatched to al-'Arish or Rafah to investigate the situation. Its captain, Cpt Weymouth was to file a strong protest with Turkish authorities if he found that the posts had actually been removed.<sup>110</sup>

On 27 April orders were in fact issued to Minerva to carry out the mission that had been proposed by the British commissioner in Cairo.<sup>111</sup>

On the 1st of May Cpt Weymouth filed the required report. He reported that the posts had in fact been moved by the Turks, and he stated that although the Turks had tried to prevent the British warship from approaching land, the British commander accompanied by a senior official, Na'um Bey Shuqayr, were able to meet with the commander of the Ottoman force in Rafah and to deliver the protest to him.<sup>112</sup>

## 2. The Kind of Measure Required

Since the futility of negotiations had already been established following these lengthy attempts that were made from the time the Turks occupied Taba till early May 1906, it was expected that the required measure would essentially be military. Both sides to the dispute had refused to utilize other peaceful means of resolving the problem. The British government rejected arbitration, and the sultan thought it would "cause numerous complications that the Ottoman government could do without."<sup>113</sup> Cromer refused to have the matter taken to the court in The Hague because "that would give Germany an opportunity to treat us in the same way with regard to our position at the Peninsula Conference, and it would stir up the entire Egyptian question."<sup>114</sup> The sultan rejected that idea too in

a telegram he sent to his ambassador in London. The sultan stated in that telegram that "he was strong enough to defend his own rights." <sup>115</sup>

It was decided from the outset that that action should not come from the Red Sea so that it would not be construed as a threat to Islamic holy places and thus provoke Islamic sentiments. <sup>116</sup>

The British government did actually go out of its way from the very beginning to avoid provoking Islamic sentiments both inside and outside Egypt, especially since it had received numerous warnings in that regard. At a meeting between Sir O'Connor and Sultan 'Abd-al-Hamid on 5 March, the latter intimated that the British position was precarious "because the disputed territory was directly related to Islamic holy sites." <sup>117</sup> Blunt also cautioned at the same time about the gravity of the Sinai problem because it was associated with "the land pilgrimage route between Cairo and al-Madinah." <sup>118</sup>

A decision was also made to rule out any local military measure. When the British ambassador in Istanbul suggested that a British force advance toward the disputed areas and drive the Turkish forces out of Taba and out of al-'Aqabah if necessary, <sup>119</sup> the minister of foreign affairs turned down that suggestion because driving out the Turks and establishing control over the area would require assembling many troops. Also the heat at that time of year--this was in May--would not encourage taking such a measure. <sup>120</sup>

It was thought that the most appropriate measure would be "a naval demonstration in the east Mediterranean Sea" near the Turkish coast. Sir Edward Grey suggested that the British fleet assemble first in Piraeus, Greece. If that turned out to be not enough to make the Ottomans yield, units of that fleet would advance toward the Turkish held islands of Limnos and Mitlini in the Aegean Sea, and they would stay there until a satisfactory settlement could be reached. <sup>121</sup>

Representatives of the British government in Cairo and Istanbul agreed fully with that measure. O'Connor stated, "The sultan will yield to the logic of force manifested in the naval demonstrations on the waters off the Levantine coast." <sup>122</sup>

Nothing was left after that but to issue the ultimatum and take the military and political measures that were necessary to carry it out.

#### The Ultimatum

After a decision was made on the kind of action the British government thought ought to be taken, communications with friendly countries began so that these countries could be informed of that decision. France was the most enthusiastic country about helping the British. Its ambassador in London, Mr Paul (Cambeau), stated that instructions had been sent immediately to the French ambassador in Istanbul asking him to use his influence to force the sultan to agree to British demands. <sup>123</sup> The Russian and Italian ambassadors in London were also contacted: the former expressed his country's willingness to help; <sup>124</sup> and the latter stated that his country welcomed such a step. <sup>125</sup>

However, it must be stated here for the record that the British Foreign Office

did not want anything from these countries but "specific diplomatic assistance." Any use of force was to be carried out only by the British because they were the only ones capable of carrying out such force.<sup>126</sup>

The possibility of having some units of the British fleet in Egypt join the rest of the fleet that was to be used in carrying out the required military measure was considered from a military standpoint. Cromer agreed to have Minerva join that fleet, but he strongly objected to the idea of withdrawing Diana from al-'Aqabah "to keep the Turks from occupying Far'un Island and Nakhl. That would cause severe disturbances in the Islamic world and complicate matters further. Keeping Diana where it is would make the destruction of al-'Aqabah possible if the Turks were to advance toward Nakhl or the Suez Canal. With Diana maintaining its position, the Turks would not be able to use the wells of al-'Aqabah, and that would make their advance impossible."<sup>127</sup> The point of view of the British commissioner in Cairo was fully accepted in that regard.<sup>128</sup>

After all these arrangements were completed, Sir O'Connor presented a lengthy memorandum to the foreign minister of the Ottoman state on Thursday, 3 May 1906. Sir O'Connor reminded the minister early in his memorandum of the decree installing Khedive 'Abbas. He reminded him of the 8 April 1892 telegram regarding the administration of Sinai and the memorandum of the British commissioner in Cairo to the Egyptian chief of the foreign office on the 13th of the same month interpreting that telegram. The memorandum went on to say, "Contrary to what has been mentioned in that memorandum, the imperial government did occupy Taba with a military force, and it refused to withdraw that force despite repeated requests that it do so and despite the fact that Taba is located in territory that is undoubtedly subject to the administration of His Highness the Khedive.

"What was mentioned in the grand vizier's correspondence to the khedive has made the Cairo talks totally impossible. Also, the significance of accepting what was mentioned in this correspondence would have grave implications on the Suez Canal and on Egypt. The talks have continued now for several weeks without making any progress to speak of. Instead, the Sublime Porte's allegations with regard to the administration of Egypt have grown.

"The Ottoman government must know that the British government will not remain silent about the fact that His Highness the Khedive's rights are being violated and that his territory is being attacked.

"Accordingly, I have the honor of informing Your Highness that the British foreign secretary has instructed me to inform you that the Ottoman government has to agree to define the borders between Rafah and the headland at the Gulf of Aqaba. That definition of the border is to be based on the 8 April 1892 telegram. I've also been instructed to inform you that you are to evacuate Taba.

"Any delay will cause the situation to become more difficult. I would add that if this is not achieved in 10 days, the consequences will be extremely grave."<sup>129</sup>

The highly intricate and complex story of the following 10 days starts out with the story of the internationally supported British military actions. These actions were supported by public opinion inside the country, and extensive

security precautions were taken in Egypt to protect it from any possible Turkish attack.

The other side of the picture makes it clear that all Turkish attempts to extricate Turkey from Britain's stranglehold failed. It may even be noted that the harder the Turks tried to extricate themselves, the tighter that stranglehold became.

It was normal that the final outcome of this logical sequence of events would be Turkey's total capitulation and an end to the crisis.

The following details may be highlighted based on this outline:

#### First: British Actions and the International and Domestic Situation

On the morning of 4 May orders were issued to the British fleet in the Mediterranean Sea, under the command of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, to advance to Piraeus. Units of this fleet did in fact begin carrying out the orders immediately after they were joined by the warship Minerva which had completed its mission in Rafah.<sup>130</sup>

When these naval movements were announced, the French ambassador in Istanbul strongly advised the Turkish foreign minister to comply with British demands.<sup>131</sup>

At the same time instructions were issued to Mr Zinovyev, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul to coordinate his efforts with his French and British colleagues so as to increase pressure on the Sublime Porte.<sup>132</sup>

The Russian foreign minister informed the British ambassador in St Petersburg that he would be delighted to cooperate with the two countries that Russia had cooperated with at a recent conference--he was referring to the Peninsula Conference.<sup>133</sup>

Cooperation between the British, the French and the Russians in Istanbul was such that the French Embassy was somehow able to obtain a map that had been drawn by the command of the Fifth Turkish army. This was a map of the proposed borders between Turkey and Egypt. Mr Constance turned over this map to his colleague, Sir O'Connor, immediately.<sup>134</sup>

However, it was Germany's posture that was still being questioned. Major German interests had grown in the Ottoman state at that time, and there were articles in the press, especially in AL-LIWA', calling for an Islamic League in Cairo. These articles always glorified the friendship between the Ottomans and the Germans. Besides Baron von Oppenheim, the honorary secretary of the German consulate had visited Mukhtar Pasha repeatedly during the crisis. All that cast doubts and suspicions concerning the German attitude toward the conflict between the British and the Ottomans.

This led Sir Edward Grey, in a meeting with the German ambassador in London, to warn that ambassador about Baron Oppenheim's conduct. Sir Edward reminded the German ambassador that the assistance which the Germans had offered the sultan during the Macedonia crisis had encouraged him to go further.<sup>135</sup>

Mr (Cambeau), the French ambassador in London, also talked with his German colleague, and he told him what the French government thought about Baron Oppenheim's actions in Cairo. Not only were these actions harmful to British interests in Egypt, but they were also harmful to all countries that had colonies in the Islamic world because they encouraged the spirit that is advocating setting up an Islamic League. 136

Although Britain and France had been trying to keep Germany out of the conflict, Germany was actually not involved in the conflict at first. On 29 April the semi-official NORTH GERMAN GAZETTE published an article denying that Germany had anything to do with encouraging Turkey on the matter of al-'Aqabah. DIE FRANKFURTER ZEITUNG, which came out 1 day earlier, also published another lengthy article in which the same denial was made. 137

On the 2nd of May the German foreign minister met with the Turkish ambassador in Berlin and asked him why the sultan felt compelled to spread rumors that Germany was on his side in his conflict with Britain. 138

On the following day the British ambassador met with a senior official in the German Foreign Ministry who told him that "The Turkish ambassador was told that the German government could not possibly help his government in that matter. The advice that was given to him in that regard did not go beyond encouraging his government to come to an understanding with the British government." 139

Before the crisis ended the DEUTSCHE KOLONIAL ZEITUNG, a publication that expresses the opinions of the German Foreign Ministry, referred to the futility of the opinion which holds that Germany had encouraged the sultan in the matter of the Egyptian-Turkish borders. It stated that that opinion conflicted with German interests, which are the product of increased trade interests with Egypt. 140

This meant that from an international standpoint the British had total freedom to pursue their military action.

In addition, domestic support for British policy in that matter was total. If we were to review a few meetings of the House of Commons during the crisis, we would find that all the debates that were held on the subject showed satisfaction with the government's steps. The government was urged to preserve Egyptian rights 141 and to protect the Suez Canal. 142

There was only one attempt made by Blunt to round up radical members of the House and induce them to take part in a protest against the ultimatum. That protest would be based on their contention that the ultimatum violated the sultan's rights and that it could arouse the ire of the Islamic world. That attempt failed completely because those members of the House were so angry with the sultan that none of them agreed to take part in that protest. 143

The British press also supported the government's plan. We found nothing in the press that opposed the government's plan except Mr Blunt's faint voice when THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN published the letter he sent to Sir Edward Grey to protest the measure that had been directed toward the sultan on 12 May. 144

## Second, the Local Situation

Scattered news about some Turkish military movements was arriving in London before and after the ultimatum was issued. Mr John Dickson, the British consul in Jerusalem reported in late April that 400 Turkish soldiers had landed in Jaffa. He also estimated that the number of Turks in al-'Aqabah was 2,450 men.<sup>145</sup>

On 7 May the same consul sent a report that orders had been issued to reinforce Jaffa. He also reported that forces from Jaffa had reached the borders at Rafah.<sup>146</sup> It was learned on the following day that the Turks could amass 20,000 men in Ma'an in a matter of 2 weeks.<sup>147</sup>

Cromer found the news disturbing, and he thought that preparations should be made to confront the Turks' movement toward the Suez Canal.

The first step that was taken in that regard was that of sending a military force of 100 coast guard men to Nakhl with two artillery guns and a (mountain) gun. It was known that any foreign power that could controll that important strategic post could threaten the Suez Canal.<sup>148</sup>

Cromer's growing concern for the security of the canal led him to demand that the British fleet and British troops advance toward it. But before that advance could be completed, three matters had to be determined.

1. The extent to which the presence of military ships in the Suez Canal or the construction of military bases on its shores agreed with Article Eight of the 1888 Constantinople Treaty.
2. How effective would the British fleet be in preventing the Turks from crossing the canal if the fleet stayed in Lake Timsah.
3. How many troops from India or Britain can be provided in such a situation by the War Office.<sup>149</sup>

Sir Malcolm (McLeroyth), judicial counsel to the British government answered the first of Cromer's questions by saying that there were no conflicts between taking steps to defend the Suez Canal and the 1888 treaty.<sup>150</sup>

The British Foreign Office and War Office were informed of the other points that had been raised by the British commissioner. In fact, the Ministry of India was also consulted about the matter since it was decided that Indian troops would be used to help defend the Suez Canal and Egypt in case they are attacked.<sup>151</sup>

Since application of Article Eight of the Canal Treaty regarding the presence of a force in the canal to defend it, if that should become necessary, required assurances from two representatives of the countries that signed the treaty with the British representative in Cairo, it was decided that urgent talks be held in this regard with the French and Russian governments.

The necessary contacts with the French ambassador in London were made, and he informed the British government that his government was willing to cooperate

fully on that matter. Similar contacts with the Russian government also succeeded in reaching the same objectives.<sup>152</sup>

On the basis of these communications a strong force of frigates and torpedo boats was sent to Egyptian waters. This force, which was led by Rear Admiral Sir Headworth Lambton, remained in a state of alert so that any possible Turkish attack on the canal could be repelled.<sup>153</sup> The War Office also agreed to keep the required Indian troops in a state of readiness so they can be dispatched at the request of the British Commissioner in Cairo.<sup>154</sup>

At the same time, on 12 May, there were secret communications between the British vice consul in Gaza, Mr Knesevish, and a large number of city residents who stated that "they were dissatisfied with the Turks. They said that they had taken all they could take and that they were willing to write a petition that prominent figures in Gaza would sign. This petition would ask for protection, and it would be presented to the consulate."

"The men of the city" also asked the vice consul to see to it that the Egyptian borders be extended to Asdud so that they would be in Egypt as they have always been.<sup>155</sup>

Of course, all these communications proved to be very valuable as a defensive measure that could be used in case of a possible Turkish attack. With that measure the people of these towns could be stirred up against Ottoman rule if such an attack were to occur.

### Third: the Political Battle

The first Turkish reaction to the British ultimatum was this: on the morning of 5 May the sultan sent Najib Pasha to the British ambassador in Istanbul as his special envoy. The sultan sent a letter to the British ambassador reaffirming that he would honor the 8 April telegram and stating that he was staking no claims west of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Sir O'Connor responded to that by saying that first the sultan had to act on these assurances by evacuating Taba and defining the borders between Sinai and al-Hijaz Province. He also cautioned the sultan's envoy against continuing this unofficial method because his government was determined to follow formality to the letter.<sup>156</sup>

Najib Pasha returned that same evening carrying with him from the sultan a draft treaty to resolve the crisis. The most important points of that proposed treaty were as follows:

1. Britain would recognize the sultan's sovereignty over Egypt.
2. The sultan would recognize all the treaties and decrees concerning Egypt.
3. When necessary, the sultan's forces would take part in defending Egypt and the Suez Canal alongside Great Britain.



The sultan's envoy stated that if the British government approved this treaty, Taba would be evacuated and a joint Turkish-British committee would be formed to define the borders.

O'Connor's response to that suggestion was no less vehement than his response to the first one. He told Najib Pasha that he saw no need for such a treaty since there was no need to explore the matter of the sultan's recognition of the decrees he had issued.<sup>157</sup>

Cromer also rejected the idea of issuing any statement about the sultan's sovereignty over Egypt. That matter had never been the subject of any question, but it seems that the objective was to achieve a diplomatic victory that would have a major impact here--that is, in Cairo.<sup>158</sup>

Afterwards, Istanbul thought it ought to change its political style, so it undertook a desperate attempt to keep the British completely out of the conflict in view of the fact that the matter concerned Egypt and the Ottoman state only. On that basis the grand vizier sent the khedive a telegram on 7 May asking him to talk directly with Mukhtar Pasha regarding the matter of the borders.<sup>159</sup>

This telegram stated among other things that "It is well known that Britain's presence in Egypt depends on the military occupation of the country. Britain's intervention in this matter is inappropriate since this is something that concerns you only. Since the sultan charged you with the task of administering Egyptian territory, he is asking that you make it impossible for any foreign power to intervene. We are awaiting your response."

On Cromer's advice the khedive sent a telegram in reply to the grand vizier and told him that he had nothing further to add to his previous opinions in responding to that matter.<sup>160</sup>

After that Turkish attempt failed, Ottoman authorities began gradually yielding on their position. At the same time the British maintained a hard line approach, and they continued applying pressure until the crisis ended with a total Turkish surrender.

On the day following the khedive's reply the Turkish foreign minister received Sir O'Connor and told him that the sultan had ordered the Ottoman troops to withdraw from Taba and to maintain the current condition in Sinai.

Since the Turkish minister offered no assurances to show that Turkish troops had been withdrawn from the areas they had occupied, the British ambassador replied that this new attempt was nothing more than a waste of time and that the matter had become extremely grave.<sup>161</sup>

As a result of the Turkish attempt to defuse the situation without providing a specific response to the ultimatum, it was decided that the forces of the British fleet would occupy the islands of Mitlini and Limnos on Sunday, the day the ultimatum was to expire. This was to be done to impede Turkish shipping in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>162</sup>

It was also decided that censorship be imposed on the Turkish telegraph line,

which goes through al-'Arish, and on the eastern mail route, which is controlled by the Eastern Telegraph Company. The censorship was a means of applying pressure on the sultan, especially since the telegrams coming from Yemen passed through that route.<sup>163</sup> The only reservation that the British Postal Services had about this action had to do with giving the International Telegraph Office in Bern notice so as not to violate international treaties.<sup>164</sup>

While British authorities were "twisting the Ottoman state's arm," Sir Edward Grey made other suggestions. These were further oppressive methods that would be used if the Sublime Porte should turn down the ultimatum.

The British foreign minister's most important suggestions were as follows:

1. Mukhtar Pasha was to be recalled from Egypt.
2. The Turks were to be expelled from al-Sallum Bay.
3. The sultan was to be denied the right to veto Egypt's right to obtain credit.
4. A claim was to be made for appropriate compensation for all the expenditures incurred by the British government in the course of the naval demonstration or of any other measures that could have been necessary.
5. All matters that were pending between the British government and the Sublime Porte were to be determined.<sup>165</sup>

These suggestions were completely in accord with Cromer's opinion. Cromer wanted Mukhtar Pasha out of Egypt at any price.<sup>166</sup>

Instructions were actually issued to Sir O'Connor to tell the Ottomans that their unwillingness to comply with British demands will result in new demands being made upon them.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, there was an obvious wish to give the Sublime Porte some way out so the Ottomans could withdraw without losing face completely. Therefore, it was decided to approve the sultan's request that his rights over Egypt be affirmed; that request was granted in one of the British ambassador's letters to the sultan.<sup>168</sup>

When O'Connor met with the grand vizier to give him the new warning, the latter informed O'Connor that he had asked the khedive to appoint the envoys who would work with the Turkish envoys on defining Egypt's administrative borders for the peninsula. He told him that the withdrawal from Taba and from other locations would begin that evening.

Despite the fact that that response complied fully with British demands, the British ambassador found it unsatisfactory "since such a solution to the problem would give the Turkish government an opportunity to revive its claims at any other time."<sup>169</sup>

The British commissioner in Cairo also rejected such a resolution to the problem because the sultan might think that a settlement had been reached by means of a direct agreement between him and the khedive. Therefore, there would be no need

to reaffirm the 8 April 1892 telegram, which is part of the decrees that cannot be changed without the consent of the British government. "Therefore, it was quite likely that this problem would come up once again after a short time if adequate precautions were not taken."<sup>170</sup>

Although Khedive 'Abbas the Second did send a reply to the grand vizier telling him that he was satisfied with his suggestions and that he would send his envoys to define the borders, the British considered that response to be an impediment to their actions.<sup>171</sup> However, Sir O'Connor insisted on getting a reply to the ultimatum, and that led the Turkish foreign minister to promise him that he would inform him of the sultan's decision before the evening of 14 May.<sup>172</sup> Sir Grey also applied pressure on Musurus Pasha in London and told him that the sultan's reply had to be received before the meeting of the British cabinet on the following day. He told him that the situation would become extremely grave if the Turkish government continued to ignore Britain's position in Egypt.<sup>173</sup>

In view of all these pressures, there was nothing for Istanbul to do but yield. And that brings us to the other side of the picture.

### Conclusion

#### The Turks Yield and Recognize That Taba Is Egyptian

The tension was considerable during the few hours that intervened between Sir O'Connor's and Sir Edward Grey's warnings to the Turkish foreign minister and the Ottoman ambassador in London on the evening of 13 May and Turkey's total consent to British demands on the afternoon of the following day. Preparations were in full swing, and the possibility that a clash could occur was placed above any other possibility.

When the general commander of the Mediterranean fleet informed Cromer that he had received a telegram from the British navy informing him that the sultan will most certainly accept British demands and that he [i.e., the British commander] was making preparations to return the ships to their original posts, the British commissioner strongly rejected such thinking. He declared that even if an agreement were reached, the vessels of the fleet should not be returned to their original posts before Turkish troops evacuated Taba and Rafah.<sup>174</sup>

Admiral Charles Beresford complied with British politicians' demands. He even added that in addition to occupying Mitlini and Limnos, he could occupy the other five islands of the archipelago. He thought that occupying Rhodes, where the governor is posted, would lead to an outbreak of the Greek national movement against the Ottomans and that that movement would not be easy to destroy.<sup>175</sup>

At the same time the British stranglehold on the Ottomans was getting tighter. Cromer asked the khedive to send a telegram to the grand vizier informing him that no other solution would be satisfactory except that of having the border lines extend from Rafah to al-'Aqabah.<sup>176</sup>

Nevertheless, everyone, including the British commissioner in Cairo, expected the Turks to yield soon. And that is what happened. On the afternoon of 14 May a Turkish memorandum from the Sublime Porte was received as a response to the

British ultimatum that was dated the 3rd of the same month. The response yielded to all the demands that had been made in that regard. 177

In its memorandum the Sublime Porte consented to what was mentioned in Jawwad Pasha's telegram of 8 April 1892 to the khedive. The memorandum stated that a decision to evacuate Taba had been made and that orders had been issued to carry out that decision. The Sublime Porte also consented to having the border line extend from Rafah to the headland of the Gulf of Aqaba, three miles west of the fortress of al-'Aqabah. The sultan concluded his memorandum by expressing the hope that good relations with the British government continue.

In view of this Turkish surrender Sir O'Connor could do nothing more but express his government's total satisfaction with the Ottoman government's action in a memorandum to that government that he wrote on the same day. 178

The British government informed the friendly nations that had supported it during the crisis--France and Russia--that Turkey had yielded, and it thanked them for the assistance they had given it. 179

Turkish troops soon departed from all the posts they had occupied since the crisis began: Taba, Naqab al-'Aqabah and al-Qitar. The border posts that had been removed from Rafah were also restored, and the Ottomans withdrew east of the borders. 180

In Istanbul the sultan decided to oust 'Izzat Pasha, who was one of his principal advisers, after the failure he suffered during the crisis. 'Izzat Pasha was succeeded by Amin Bey as the intermediary between the sultan and the grand vizier. 181 The committee that was to work with the Egyptian committee chaired by Cpt Owen on drawing up the borders between the two countries was also formed, and both committees completed their work in October of the same year. When that process ended, the crisis of al-'Aqabah also ended completely; it had almost caused a clash between the British and the Ottomans. 182

The al-'Aqabah crisis influenced Egypt's future considerably. Not only did it end with the Turks yielding and defining Egypt's eastern borders, but it also spilled over into other aspects of Egypt's future, particularly those that had to do with Egypt's relations with the Ottoman state, its neighbor to the east.

We may consider those effects of that crisis to be the ones that enabled British occupation authorities to feel comfortable about declaring Egypt a protectorate after Turkey entered the war on the side of the Central powers in 1914. That crisis had enabled Britain to do away with the material aspect of Egypt's subordination to the Ottoman state. The crisis had helped Britain terminate the position of the Turkish High Commissioner in Cairo as a result of the attitude that the man who held that position during the crisis had taken. That man was al-Ghazi Mukhtar Pasha.

It is known that in 1886 the British and Turkish governments had appointed two envoys to look into those matters that pertained to the situation in Egypt. Those two men were al-Ghazi Mukhtar Pasha and Sir Henry Drummond Wolf.

The talks between the two men produced that treaty which came to be known as the

Wolf treaty. The sultan did not ratify that treaty, and it was not implemented. Although the mission for which Mukhtar Pasha had come to Cairo failed, he had remained in that city as the Turkish high commissioner.

It was very well understood that Mukhtar Pasha's relationship with some newspapers in Cairo was what induced them to launch that vehement campaign against the occupation during the crisis. That campaign was so vehement that it threatened to cause an outbreak of a religious revolution in the country. As a result, more occupation forces were summoned to confront that possible revolution.

It was also understood that Mukhtar Pasha's attitude was one of the reasons for the numerous complications that found their way into the talks and that ended up in the crisis. For example, when it was decided that a military council be convened to look into the matter on 14 February, the sultan's attitude was very friendly. O'Connor came to the conclusion that the problem was about to be solved. But the Sublime Porte's attitude changed unexpectedly, and it was announced on the following day that Taba was part of Turkish territory. It has been learned that the change in the situation was the result of a telegram the sultan had received from Mukhtar Pasha.<sup>183</sup>

Therefore, both Cromer and O'Connor considered Mukhtar Pasha their enemy. When the Turkish government decided to have Mukhtar Pasha act as its representative in advancing toward al-'Aqabah and investigating the facts about the disputed territories, the British ambassador in Istanbul informed the Turkish foreign minister that "his government was not satisfied with that choice."<sup>184</sup>

Nor did Cromer hesitate to express his anger and pessimism about the fact that the two Turkish envoys, Muzaffar Bey and Fahmi Afandi, were guests in Mukhtar Pasha's house. That fact was considered a prelude to the envoys' failure.<sup>185</sup>

Mukhtar Pasha was always in the picture during the talks. He was always prodding the sultan to hold on to the occupied posts and to safeguard others. He even induced the military commander in al-'Aqabah to submit reports to the same effect.<sup>186</sup>

For all these reasons British authorities in Cairo began not to recognize Mukhtar Pasha's position as Turkish high commissioner in the country. Cromer wrote something to that effect on 21 May. He wrote that he considered "the khedive to be the sultan's only legitimate representative in Egypt."<sup>187</sup>

When Mukhtar Pasha came forward to talk with the khedive on behalf of the Ottoman state early in April, Khedive 'Abbas, prodded by the British, refused to start the talks with him before receiving notice from Istanbul that Mukhtar Pasha was authorized to carry out such a task.<sup>188</sup>

It is obvious that that rejection implied that the Egyptian government did not recognize the man as the Turkish high commissioner in the country; the Egyptian government did not think he could represent his government without authorization from it.

The fact is that the talks did not begin until the required authorization arrived about 4 days later.<sup>189</sup>

After the crisis ended, the British government continued to watch the position of the Turkish high commissioner in Egypt until it received news that Mukhtar Pasha had resigned in the first half of August 1908.

That induced the British foreign minister to affirm that his government would not permit the appointment of a new successor to Mukhtar Pasha. Sir Edward Grey wrote to Sir Lowther, the new British ambassador in Istanbul and told him, "It is quite desirable to block the appointment of a successor to the Turkish high commissioner in Egypt now that al-Ghazi Mukhtar Pasha has relinquished that post. Let it be known that the only official representing the sultan in Egypt is the khedive."<sup>190</sup>

When Rida Pasha was appointed to that position in February of the following year, the British government declined to recognize that appointment.<sup>191</sup>

When the Ottoman state protested the British position on this matter, the protest was rejected, and Turkey was unable to carry out its wishes to appoint another man in Mukhtar Pasha's position.<sup>192</sup>

Thus, that position, which for almost one quarter of a century had symbolized Turkish presence in Egypt, was terminated. Another symbol of Turkish presence in Egypt was that decree which used to be issued by the Sublime Porte when the khedive was installed.

Thus, instead of achieving its required objectives, the attempt to occupy Taba backfired against its perpetrators and brought forth results that were directly contradictory to those that were being sought. At any rate, these results had to do with the attempt to violate the established rights and the recognized borders of countries.

#### FOOTNOTES

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2. Correspondence, Part LXIV No 48.
3. Correspondence, Part LXIV Findlay to Grey, 27 Jan 1906, Despatch No 50.
4. Ibid., No 63 Cromer to Grey, 6 Feb 1906.
5. See Document No 8.
6. Correspondence, Part LXIV, Cromer to Grey, 21 Feb 1906, No 93.
7. See Document No 8.
8. See the same document.
9. AL-MUQATTAM, No 5194, 2 May 1906; Cromer, "Modern Egypt," Vol. II, pp 268-269.
10. Philip Jallad, "Qamus al-Idarah wa al-Qada'" [Dictionary of Management and Jurisprudence] Vol VI p 759; see Document No 1.

11. Correspondence, Part LXV Cromer to Grey, No 286, 21 May 1906, Telegram No 77.
12. Philip Jallad, *Op. cit.*, Vol VI p 761.
13. Correspondence, Part LXV Cromer to Grey, No 286, 21 May 1906, Telegram No 77.
14. AL-LIWA', No 2021, 7 May 1906.
15. See Document No 8 in the English collection.
16. AL-LIWA', No 1896, 6 December; in Document No 8.
17. Correspondence, Part LXIV; included in No 26, Sir Nicholas O'Connor to Cromer, 26 Dec 1950.
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19. W.S. Blunt, "My Diaries," Part II p 133.
20. Ahmad Shafiq, "Mudhakirati fi Nisf Qarn" [My Memoirs in Half a Century], Vol II, Section 1, p 77.
21. Correspondence, Part LXV O'Connor to Grey, No 230, 3 May 1906.
22. *Ibid.*, Cromer to Grey, No 286, 21 May 1906.
23. Correspondence, Part LXIV Cromer to Grey, No 15, 15 Jan 1906.
24. Correspondence, Part LXV O'Connor to Grey, No 230, 7 May 1906.
25. AL-LIWA', No 2021, 7 May 1906.
26. Correspondence, Part LXIV O'Connor to Grey, No 27, 22 Jan 1906, Telegram No 5.
27. *Ibid.*, O'Connor to Grey, No 32, 26 Jan 1906, Telegram No 32.
28. Correspondence, Part LXIV Findlay to Grey, No 33, 27 Jan 1906, Telegram No 18.
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